

ACADEMIC COMPETITIVENESS AMONG  
GRADUATE STUDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of the study is a literature review investigating the level of academic competitiveness among graduate students in campuses across the United States.

Academic competition is impacting the students in our educational system. The pressure to excel has become a motivation behind many students. These pressures have been associated with three areas of focus. These areas can be referred to as (1) real competition, the competition between peers; (2) perceived competition, the competition a person believes is occurring between themselves and others; and (3) self competition, the way a person continuously pressures himself to become better than he is in academics. These pressures are creating a competitive environment in schools where students are using alternative methods to cope with their pressures, such as academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty entails different variations of dishonest behavior. The variations

that this literature will focus on are cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, and facilitating others in performing acts of academic dishonesty.

The educational system has been impacted by students using forms of academic dishonesty. Schools have been placed in a situation where they are searching for effective interventions to help prevent academic dishonesty. Two of the approaches being utilized by many of the educational institutions to deter academic dishonesty are honor codes and strict consequences.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Growing up, the message that our parents and educators always conveyed to us was with hard work and dedication you can do well on anything you put your mind towards. But, since that time things have changed in our society. The current trend in society appears to be a “cut-throat” approach where the theme seems to be for individuals to do what they must to get ahead of the next person (Johnson, 1997). This “cut-throat” approach has evolved through generations impacting our professions, our universities, our high schools, and even our middle schools. The need to be the best has become the motivation behind many students in today’s academic settings, which has reinforced their competitive nature and shaped it into something that our idealistic society based on morals and values was not prepared for. Our universities were not prepared to cope with the increase of students who carry out academic dishonesty in order to edge out their fellow students, and/or attain a higher level of prestige (Johnson, 1997).

An example of the level that students will go to get ahead of their peers is evident in the case of *Shank v. University of Toronto* (*Shank v. University of Toronto*, 2002). In December of 2000, Roxanne Shank had just completed her first term at the University of Toronto’s School of Law. While she was seeking employment for the summer, she submitted her December course results to prospective employers. The issue with this case was that she had changed some of the grades she had received in her courses by modifying her transcripts. This misconduct was discovered when a potential employer had contacted the University to confirm her marks in these courses. Shank received a one year suspension from the University of Toronto for the 2001 academic year and a

condition that a notation would be placed on her record until three months after her graduation. (Shank v. University of Toronto, 2002). This is just one example of the lengths that students are willing to go to in order to give themselves an edge on their peers. One of the possible factors to consider is the pressures these students are faced with to succeed in academics.

The pressure to succeed has a profound meaning to students of all ages (Raffini, 1986). These pressures may come from an array of sources, both externally and internally. Sources of pressure may come from their parents (Harp, 1995), from their peers (Tang, & Zuo, 1997), and/or from themselves (Tang, & Zuo, 1997). Covington and Beery (1976) have investigated self-worth and its association to school learning. They stated within their article, “Students’ self-worth is directly related to their ability to achieve—and to achieve is to be of value” (Covington, & Beery, as cited in Raffini, 1986, p. 53). This statement has not only remained accurate, but has become more evident in our education system. In 1995, Lonnie Harp investigated academic decathlons and the students who become involved in these events. What he discovered was that the students created a lot of pressure for themselves as they competed for places on their school’s team (Harp, 1995). Students studied year around just to compete for one of the nine spots on the team. They would go to the extent of not participating in other extracurricular activities that would interfere with their study time. If the students were deemed capable enough to be one of the team members, the pressure and dedication required of themselves increased. These students did not have part-time employment because it interfered with their study time. The members of the teams put pressure on their peers to study with partners on weekends, and each students average evening study

time was approximately five hours long (Harp, 1995). The striking reality is that this story represents a high school level team. At the collegiate level, the pressures students place on themselves remains just as strenuous. Students attending colleges and universities across the nation put tremendous pressures on themselves to achieve at a maximum level in all their classes. Their motivation may be that they want to get into graduate school (*UCLA Academic Climate*, n.d.), or they want to have an opportunity for a high-paying position once they finish their schooling, or it may be that they want to keep their image intact with their peers (Tang, & Zuo, 1997). There is a wide array of possibilities of why students put the pressures on themselves to the extent that they do, but this is not the only pressure these students may be feeling.

External pressures are also placed on students to succeed in academics. The pressure to succeed is placed on students very early in their academic careers by their teachers (Raffini, 1986). As students progress through the levels of academia, certain academic expectations follow them. The pressures associated with the categories teachers place in students if they are “good” students, meaning they do well in their subjects, or “poor” students, meaning they struggle with their course work, is continuously reinforced by educators (Bloom, 1981, as cited in Raffini, 1986, p53).

Trends in classrooms are to use different forms of pressure to motivate students to do well. Often educators use forms of pressure that cause embarrassment for their students. An example of this is an educator who decides that she is going to give a test to her students. She is then going to take their results and have them sit in the classroom in ranking order so that the students who did the best in the class sit in the front row and the students who did the worst will be sitting in the back row (Gay, & Rueth, 1992). This



forces students to become competitive with their peers to avoid the embarrassment of not being a successful student. The pressures to succeed academically from both internal and external sources are driving students to discover ways to give them an edge on their peers. Unfortunately, many students are taking a path of deception and dishonesty (Aggarwal, Bates, Graham, & Khan, 2002).

Academic dishonesty is thriving at all levels of our education system. “Dishonest behaviors at university have been associated with high achievers and a desire to get a better mark” (Aggarwal, et al., 2002, p 532). There is a consensus among researchers that academic dishonesty has been on the rise over the past two decades (Aggarwal, et al., 2002; Pullen, et al., 2000; Gerdeman, 2000; Glick, et al., 2001; Brown & Emmett, 2001; Athanasou, 2001). Dishonest academic behaviors are having an impact on our educational setting. Schools now have to pay for screening services that evaluate students’ papers and assignments in order to assure that the submitted materials have not been plagiarized (Athanasou, 2001).

There are a wide variety of forms of academic dishonesty that are predominant in our educational system. Some examples of the types of academic dishonesty that students resort to include copying peers’ assignments and using crib notes (Gerdeman, 2000). Students are obtaining copies of their tests prior to the examination, and they have been known to illicitly collaborate with peers on assignments and/or exams (Gerdeman, 2000). They are even going to the extent of using blackmail and/or bribery (Athanasou, 2001).

This is affecting the teachers' ability to trust their pupils. Many new rules on academic dishonesty and honor code have been put in place to help combat this growing concern, especially at the collegiate level (*Academic Dishonesty*, n.d.).

As the level of competition between students continues to increase, so may the number of students who are willing to disregard the rules so they can keep their academic edge on their peers (Brown & Emmett, 2001). Although most people can identify former or current classmates who appear extremely conscious of academic ranking and who are very competitive in nature, little empirical research is available on the topic.

### *Purpose of the Study*

Although there are an abundance of news media reports and articles pertaining to academic dishonesty and competitiveness, particularly at the undergraduate level, there is little empirical research focusing on problems at the graduate school level. The purpose of this study is to complete a review of the literature discussing the prevalence and impact of academic competitiveness and dishonesty at the graduate school level. The study will focus on the following objectives:

1. To explain the premise of academic competitiveness.
2. To discuss different perspectives of academic competition
3. To discuss pressures involved to succeed
4. To identify the impact of academic competition.
5. To examine examples of the extreme lengths students go to in order to succeed.

### *Significance of the Study*

The significance of the study is to assess the impact that academic competition is having on our educational system, how is it affecting the students, and the effects on the

academic institutions they attend. The study will examine motivations behind why students compete for academic marks, and what are the most prevalent known forms that students use to enhance their academic edge on their peers. It will look into gender differences and look at future implications of academic competition among graduate students. The purpose of this information is to help us determine if investing our judgments on students based on their academic marks is the best way to evaluate student's progress in an academic program.

### *Definition of Terms*

#### *Academic Competitiveness.*

The act of competing in an educational setting, (school, university), against one's peers and/or classmates.

#### *Academic Dishonesty.*

Definitions of academic dishonesty provided by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. The definition includes:

**Cheating:** Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in any academic exercise.

**Fabrication:** Intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

**Plagiarism:** Intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as your own in any academic exercise.

**Facilitating Academic Dishonesty:** Intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

*Graduate Students.*

A person who has graduated from a 4-year academic institution and is attending or has attended a professional school.

## Chapter II

### Review of Relevant Literature

The review of literature addresses the current issues and concerns associated with academic competitiveness. The purpose of the literature review is to provide the reader with the information available regarding academic competitiveness and give some insight into current literature. The topics to be addressed within this study are the pressures placed on students to succeed, the different types of competition students are facing, and the common forms of academic dishonesty within our colleges and universities.

#### *Premise for Academic Competitiveness*

The first underlying issue to address when discussing academic competitiveness is the pressures the students feel to succeed. The pressure to perform well in academics comes from both internal and external sources. As was stated in the previous chapter, these sources may take many forms, such as peer pressure, parent expectations, teacher expectations, self expectations, or preservation of self-image.

Researchers have discussed that competitive students begin feeling pressures to succeed in academics at a very early age (Raffini, 1986). They discovered that the students who perform well in first grade were expected by their educators to perform equally as well in the 11th grade. When looking more in-depth at this trend, they went on to find, "...the correlation between measures of school achievement at grade three and grade eleven is about .85, demonstrating that over this eight year period the relative ranking of students in a class or school remains almost perfectly fixed" (Bloom, 1981, as cited in Raffini, 1986, p.53). A different team of researchers led by Raffini also investigated the effects of competition on young students (Raffini, 1986). During their

study, they found that teachers often use competition as a means to motivate their students. One method the researchers commented on was the use of impacting the student's image. An example of how this strategy works is the instructor will inform the students that they will be taking an exam. In the case where the teacher seated the students by test performance, the students who received the highest marks were seated in the front row from left to right. This ranking order placement continued until the student who performs the poorest on the exam will be seated in the last seat in the classroom (Gay & Rueth, 1992). The researchers found that this procedure had a negative effect on the students in many ways. The students in the class were forced to become competitive and compete among one another because they were trying to avoid the shame associated with being known as the one who did the poorest on the exam. This type of academic encouragement from instructors may have introduced students to the concept of motivation.

The word "motivation" is derived from the word "motive", which is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "the force that causes a person to act" (Merriam-Webster, 1989). Motivation can come in positive forms, such as receiving praise and rewards, or in negative forms, such as humiliation. A student's motivation can stem from many areas. Some forces that may motivate students are; wanting to be the best in their classes, wanting to be look up at by their peers, trying to get into the college or graduate program they desire, trying to gain employment with the employer they wish, or it may be financial goals.

Researchers have investigated students' motivations. In Bandura's social cognitive paradigm, he discussed two factors that are considered important for

motivation. These two factors are self-efficacy and the perceived value by the student. (Bandura , 1977, as cited from Sadrine, 2000, p.1). Bandura put forward that individuals are motivated by attempting to maintain, or enhance themselves, and the value the person places on the goal. The expectancy theory suggests that an individual determines the amount of effort they are willing to exert based on three perceptual relationships, which: (a) expectancy-an individual's subjective estimation of the likelihood of successfully performing a particular behavior; (b) instrumentality-a person's subjective estimation of the likelihood that a particular behavior will be rewarded; and (c) valence-the positive or negative value that a person places on a reward (Hancock, 2001). This theory suggests that a person's motivation to perform a behavior is weighed by the person's belief that the behavior is likely to elicit a reward, and the value the individual has placed on attaining that reward. In both models, researchers agree that the basis behind a person's motivation is the value they place on their goals (Hancock, 2001).

Little research has been done that focuses on how motivation impacts students at the collegiate level. The prevalent literature does suggest that some of the motivational factors that drive competition between students are trying to obtain higher GPAs to enter graduate school, competition for employment following graduation, and financial rewards such as their salary (Pullen, et al., 2000). Although there is scant research available discussing motivation, it appears to be an underlying driving force behind a student's competitive nature. Based on the expectancy theory, competitive students appear to be highly motivated individuals who are focused on obtaining their goals. Their motivation and efforts have been found to have an impact on their academic achievements.

*Academic Competition*

Academic achievement, or how well a student performs in school, is suggested to be a related factor to motivation (Hancock, 2001). The degree to which a student is motivated to do well on a task will have an impact on how well s/he performs on that task. Research was conducted that focused on how motivation impacts a student's academic achievement (Hancock, 2001). What Hancock proposed from his findings was that "a student's motivation parallels their findings related to a student's achievement" (Hancock, 2001, p.6). In other words, the amount of motivation a person feels towards obtaining their goal is equal to how well they will succeed in obtaining the goal.

Other researchers have had similar findings relating to how motivation relates to achievement (Albaili, 1997). Albaili looked at the differences between low, average, and high-achieving college students. What he found was that motivation was the most powerful factor that separated low-achieving students from high-achieving students (Albaili, 1997). Those students who were highly motivated to perform well put forth the most effort preparing for their classes. They attended all their classes and reviewed their materials every night for 2-3 hours. These students consistently performed at a higher level than their peers. Albaili's research also suggested that students who do not perform well in academics had a tendency to not be motivated and do not put in much effort preparing for their classes. The literature suggests that a person's motivation drives their achievement in academics.

*Pressure to Succeed*

The pressures felt by students to succeed appear to be a driving force in their lives. This is then used to create their motivation to perform well in academics. These



factors all act as underlying dynamics which all interact to create competition.

Competition can be thought of as the act of attempting to attain a goal to the exclusion of others attempting to obtain the same goal. There are three variations that are discussed when looking at competition: 1) Real competition, 2) Perceived competition, and 3) Self competition.

*Real competition.* The concept of real competition is the topic most discussed in literature (Johnson, 1997). Real-competition is competition between students that has been measured through research. These are students and educators that have participated in surveys and studies which have given researchers information to determine if students are competing against one another. Competition is not an unhealthy act. On the contrary, competition is beneficial in that it motivates people to perform at their highest potential, however, overemphasis on competition can be detrimental. Two areas where you may see real-competition are in classes and for positions with employers.

A study done in 1998 by Zeng & Le Tendre investigated adolescent suicide and academic competition in East Asia, where there has been speculation that their society is the most competitive in the world (Zeng & Le Tendre, 1998). What they found through their research on middle school and high school age students was overall competition appears to have increased between 1955 and 1990 (Zeng & Le Tendre, 1998). Even though the rate of suicide has fallen during that time period, the number of student suicides that have been associated with academic competition increased. Le Tendre's research went on to look at the same variables in college and university students. He

found that “the average competition ratio for all universities increased from 4.9 to 9.4 from 1960 to 1990, most notably among private universities” (LeTendre, 1998, p.520).

Raffini has also discussed how competitive students are in the United States (Raffini, 1986). In the United States, real competition between students has been found to begin early in their education. Our educational system has been designed so that most schools rely heavily on using norm-referenced material. The purpose of norm-referencing is to evaluate and compare one student’s ability with the other students. By using norm-referenced evaluations, educators may determine what is considered “average” performance. This allows them to have a baseline so they can then determine other categories for students to be placed, such as “high” performance and “low” performance (Raffini, 1986). By using this type of evaluation system, students learn that their value and image is based on how well they perform (Raffini, 1986). Students are consistently made aware of their value by their instructors through testing, quizzes, and assignments which provide them with constant feedback on their level of performance. This information is sometimes used to organize students in the classroom by their performance (Raffini, 1986). This evaluative process is then utilized throughout the entire educational system. Many states have students take national achievement tests each year, such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, to assess their ability level from year to year. Guidance and career counselors create a norm-referenced data base that ranks students against their classmates. Most universities require information from norm-referenced tests, such as the ACT or SAT, to help determine if the student demonstrates the level of performance they are looking for in their students. This system of evaluation helps create real competition between students.

Real competition can also be seen for positions in the workforce. The job market is a highly competitive atmosphere where there are many individuals who compete for the few positions available in their chosen field. Positions with agencies such as the FBI (*Honors Programs*, n.d.) are highly sought after by many individuals. Unfortunately, the reality is that there are very few positions available in these agencies. Because these positions are rare, but highly sought, these agencies can be highly selective in their hiring process. This creates a highly competitive environment between those individuals vying for these positions. Only individuals with strong academic credentials, a particular type of personality, and a high level of motivation are considered for these programs (*Honors Programs*, n.d.).

Perceived competition. Perceived competition is different from competition worthy of discussion. Trusty, Robinson, and colleagues described how perceived competition can be seen as the situation where a person feels that they are competing against someone else, but have no evidence that the other person is competing against them. An area in the literature where perceived competition has been examined is between genders (Trusty, et al., 2000). There are stereotypes for both males and females which circulate throughout society. In order to try to eliminate stereotypes between genders, those perceived as having weaknesses in certain areas will often attempt to overcome the stereotypes by competing with those perceived to be strong in those areas.

A study was conducted in 2000 which evaluated the effects of gender and its implications on academic performance for males and females (Trusty, et al., 2000). In the article, Trusty and colleagues discussed the academic stereotype that males have a tendency to perform better in mathematics and females have a tendency to perform better

in reading. The researchers took these stereotypes and looked at how each genders performance in their area impacted their choice of which field to study in postsecondary education. Their findings concluded that “over the last three decades, girls are becoming less stereotypical than boys in their occupational aspirations” (Trusty, et al., 2000, p.464). A different study, completed in 2001, looked into sex and ethnic group differences in accomplishment measures at the graduate school level (Stricker, Rock, Bennett, & Elliot). The foundation for Stricker and his associate’s research was based on the stereotype that males have a higher level of performance in mathematical areas and females will perform better in language areas, regardless of ethnicity. Their findings indicated that these stereotypes were inconsistent. Males and females did not differ in their levels of performance (Stricker, et al., 2001). It appeared from the research that females have been competing more with males to overcome gender stereotypes than males have been with females.

Self-competition. Self competition is the third area relating to academic competition. Self-competition is when a student continues to push her or himself to perform better. They compete with themselves, in a sense. These are the students who are not satisfied with their performance unless they have obtained perfect marks in their classes. These individuals can be identified as the ones who need to be the best at whatever they do (Harp, 1995).

The literature on self competition does not discuss any positive outcomes from self competition, but focuses on its negative aspects. Students have reported to researchers that most of the academic pressures they feel are “self-induced” (Harp, 1995). These self-induced pressures may be seen as a starting point where other reactions

culminate. Zeng and Le Tendre (1998) suggested that adolescents who attempt suicide and academic competition are related factors. Their thoughts were that students who attempt suicide may be responsive to scholastic pressures to succeed (Zeng, & Le Tendre, 1998). Their model of the “Impact of Academic Competition on Adolescent Suicides” displays a three step progression. The first step is “increased awareness of competition for high school and college placement over time” (Zeng, & Le Tendre, 1998, p.527). This leads into “heightened perception of competition among students” (Zeng, & Le Tendre, 1998, p.527). The model concludes with “higher likelihood for emotionally troubled adolescents to cite ‘school’ or ‘exams’ as reason for suicide” (Zeng, & Le Tendre, 1998, p.527). Based on their model, LeTendre & Zeng indicated that the pressures students put on themselves to perform well in school may put enough stress on them to cause emotional difficulties. They also found that “pressures caused by competition on entrance exams have been linked to higher rates of juvenile delinquency, bullying, and suicide” (Zeng, & Le Tendre, 1998, p.519).

Another negative implication of self competition is when it may be indirectly forced upon students. These situations occur when students find themselves in competitive classrooms where their teachers use such tools as class ranks to motivate their students. Gay and Rueth’s (1992) study on the negative side effects of competition and retention, discussed an example of such a situation. From their research they found that in situations where the educator places their students in an order based on their performance on a assignment, approximately 25% of the class who had a history of academic difficulty was focused on finding a way to stay out of the “stupid seat” (Gay, & Rueth, 1992).

*Academic Dishonesty*

Academic dishonesty is another area to discuss when looking at factors associated with academic competitiveness. Dishonest behaviors from students have been associated with high achievers and a desire to get better grades (Aggarwal, Bates, Graham, & Khan, 2002). Academic dishonesty has many factors associated with it. Some of the most common ones blanketed by the term academic dishonesty are cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating, and facilitating academic dishonesty.

Researchers have devoted much time to examining the notion of cheating at the collegiate level. They describe cheating as “a problem of tremendous magnitude on U.S. campuses” (Brown & Emmett, 2001, p.247). The estimated percentages of students who have cheated vary from study to study. In 1993, Brown & Emmett proposed that approximately 70% of the student body from nine medium to large universities had cheated on their academics (Brown & Emmett, 2001). A more recent study was conducted in 2000 examining the percentage of students who have cheated while in college. Their research estimated that approximately 80%-90% of the students surveyed had cheated in their classes (Pullen, Ortloff, Casey, & Payne, 2000). Other research has reported that approximately 2 in 3 students have cheated at the college level (Gerdeman, 2000).

Cheating is not exclusive to the undergraduate level. Aggarwal, Bates, and colleagues have reported that in medical school, approximately 56% of the students have cheated (Aggarwal, Bates, Graham, & Khan, 2002). Doctors who have been surveyed reported that approximately 58% admitted to cheating while in medical school (Glick, Letters, Rennie, & Crosby, 2001).

Different variables associated with cheating have been researched. One area is how social groups impact the likelihood of cheating (Storch, & Storch, 2002). It has been reported that factors such as being part of a sorority or fraternity increase the likelihood that a student will cheat. Other variables which researchers reported as increasing the probability that a student will cheat is if they are in many clubs, participate in a large number of activities, or are part of an athletic team (Storch, & Storch, 2002). There are findings that have also reported that the number of students who cheat increase as they progress through each year of college until their senior year. The number of student then decreases (Tang & Zuo, 1997). The literature also discusses the impact that students who cheat have on those who do not cheat. They have found that cheating has a negative impact on those who do not cheat because it raises the level of the grading scale that most professors use (Gerdeman, 2000). Many professors use a grading curve for their classes. The grading curve allows a certain percentage of students to receive “A’s”, “B’s”, down to “F’s”. When students receive higher grades because of cheating, it moves the students who did not cheat down on the percentage scale.

Plagiarism. Plagiarism is a form of cheating that is becoming more prevalent in colleges and universities. Plagiarism is defined as intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as your own in any academic exercise. (*Academic Dishonesty*, n.d.). In a poll taken in March of 2001, nearly half of all students admitted to plagiarism at some time in their lives (Cowen, 2001). Nearly 100 cases involving plagiarism are reviewed by the disciplinary committee at UC-Davis each year (Cowen, 2001).

Plagiarism has been discussed by researchers as being one of the fastest growing and most prevalent forms of cheating (Athanasou, 2001). Its rapid growth has been associated with the use of computers. The internet provides students with a magnitude of resources that are easy to access. The internet also provides websites that allow for students to download and purchase material from someone else (Cowen, 2001). In addition, plagiarism has been shown to occur more frequently in larger universities than smaller colleges (Thorpe, Pittenger, & Reed, 1999). These authors attribute this trend to smaller colleges because they are more likely to use essay exams than multiple choice exams and smaller class sizes do not allow the same opportunities to cheat (Thorpe, et al., 1999). They have estimated that approximately 16% of cheating occurs in the form of plagiarism (Athanasou, 2001).

*Fabrication.* Fabricating work is another form of academic dishonesty that occurs in schools. Fabricating is the intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise (*Academic Dishonesty*, n.d.). There is little research available about fabrication. The literature does discuss some of the ways that students fabricate. Two of the most used methods of fabricating are copying from peers and making up false information. (Glick, et al., 2001; Athanasou, 2001; Thorpe, et al., 1999). Students do not work collaboratively with their peers, but use their work in order to get credit on assignments that they would not have completed. The literature suggests that approximately 68% of students in high school and college have reported fabricated an assignment (Athanasou, 2001). Athanasou's research was inspired by a study done by Who's Who Among American High School Students (1994) which identified that 63% of females and 72% of males had copied someone else's homework.



Athanasou's data also revealed that students who have fabricated assignments in high school are likely to continue their actions throughout college (Athanasou, 2001).

Facilitation of cheating. The facilitation of cheating is another area that falls under academic misconduct. The term "facilitation" means that someone intentionally or knowingly helped or attempted to help another person commit an act of academic dishonesty (*Academic Dishonesty*, n.d.). This can include helping a student to get ahead or preventing other students from being successful. One study has estimated that approximately 67% of students have participated in one method of academic facilitation (Athanasou, 2001).

Examples of ways people have facilitated cheating aimed at students' success are teachers feeding answers to students in academic competitions and students impersonating judges in competitions (Harp, 1995). These examples were noted from a study investigating academic decathlons. In this study, the members of a high school academic decathlon team were facilitated by their teacher in order to help them win. The teacher had first gained copies of the examination for the competition. He then reviewed all the answers with his students who were participating in the competition. During an additional portion of the competition, the team's coach provided the students answers to one portion of the test. This team then had a peer steal the nametag of a judge for the competition and pose as the judge. The imposter then gave higher scores to his school's team and lower marks to the other teams competing in order to help improve their chances of winning (Harp, 1995).

Facilitating can also be used to hinder another student's success or ability to complete a task. Methods that have been discussed in this area are; deliberately

misplacing items, such as books or journals, so that other students cannot have access to them, tearing out important information from books and journals, and destroying other students' work (Athanasou, 2001). Students have been suggested to perform such acts in order to give them an advantage over their peers by limiting their ability to succeed.

Because of the increased incidents and expanding methods by which students are engaging in academic dishonesty, schools are called upon to develop counteractive measures. One of these countermeasures is the implementation of honor codes.

### *Honor Codes*

Honor codes are contracts drawn up by instructors stating that the student agrees to not participate in academic dishonesty in their class. Honor codes also remind students of what the consequences are if they choose to participate in academic dishonesty.

McCabe & Bowers looked at the effectiveness of honor codes in schools (1994). Their findings reported that schools that utilized honor codes had an increase in cheating on tests and collaboration, while other forms of academic dishonesty decreased (McCabe, & Bowers, 1994, as cited in Brown, & Emmett, 2001). These findings were consistent with the findings of Glick, et al. (2001). This group of researchers looked at academic dishonesty in medical school. The students at these medical schools had all signed written declarations about academic dishonesty. Glick and colleagues found that this sample of medical students were much more likely to cheat on exams than participate in other forms of academic dishonesty. (Glick, et al, 2001).

Applying consequences. A different countermeasure being used is more severe consequences for academic dishonesty. Universities feel that students will be deterred from participating in academic misconduct if there are strict consequences associated

with it. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be having enough of an impact on students. The numbers of students who participate in academic dishonesty are still increasing (Brown & Emmett, 2001).

Another means of safeguarding from academic dishonesty is using technological services that specialize in checking student's papers for plagiarism. These sites are able to search for specific words or phrases in other papers linked to the site. An example of these sites is turnitin.com (turnitin.com, n.d). Universities may find these services very useful in counteracting academic dishonesty. The problem with these services is that they are often cost prohibitive. Universities must pay for the use of these services and educators may also find it difficult to review every document turned into them.

### Chapter III

#### Summary and Discussion

The research has shown that academic competition is a growing concern in our society. The current trend in society appears to be a “cut-throat” approach where the theme seems to be for individuals to do what they must to get ahead of the next person (Johnson, 1997). These societal pressures are impacting the students in our educational system. The pressure to excel has become a motivation behind many students. These pressures have been associated with three areas of focus. These areas can be referred to as the competition between peers, the competition a person believes is occurring between themselves and others, and the way a person continuously pushes him or herself to become better in areas such as academics. These pressures are creating a competitive environment in schools where students are using alternative methods to cope with their pressures, such as academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty incorporates cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, and facilitation of others.

The educational system has been impacted by students using forms of academic dishonesty. Schools have been placed in a situation where they are searching for effective interventions to help prevent academic dishonesty. Two of the approaches being utilized by many of the educational institutions to deter academic dishonesty are honor codes and strict consequences. Unfortunately, these two approaches are not able to deter students from academic dishonesty. The number of students reported to participate in academic dishonesty continues to increase every year.

*Limitations of Literature Review*

The literature review has several limitations. While the researcher attempted to review all the literature available on academic competitiveness, motivation, and academic dishonesty, some research may have been overlooked. Because of this, the current reviewer may present a biased view on academic competitiveness. Also, it must be noted that the literature review does not contribute new information. Its purpose is solely to review and summarize the previous research available on the topic. Another limitation is that much of the research conducted in the various areas of academic competitiveness, motivation, and academic dishonesty has been self reported. The students who participated in these studies may not have been honest in their reports.

*Implications for Future Research*

Further research is needed in the area of academic competitiveness. The topic of competition between students at all academic levels is often noticed and discussed between professionals, but little research has been conducted focusing on it and how it impacts students personally, socially, or academically.

Understanding the motivations behind why students compete in academics may prove to be valuable information. Today's high schools and universities are being overwhelmed with various forms of academic dishonesty. Having an understanding may help professionals comprehend why students turn towards avenues, such as plagiarism, to assist them academically. This could lead to finding more effective ways to combat academic dishonesty.

*Summary*

Academic competitiveness is a growing concern in our educational system. Our educational system fosters competition in students at a very young age. It teaches and promotes competition amongst themselves throughout their educational career. Many students become highly competitive. They feel pressure from both internal and external sources to perform well in school. Some of these pressures may stem from peers, parent expectations, teacher expectations, self expectations, or the preservation of their self-image. These pressures have both positive and negative effects on the students. Types of pressures are used by many students as a source of motivation. They strive to perform well in academics in order to cope with the pressures placed on them. This is the foundation for academic competition. As students struggle to meet the expectations placed on them, they sometimes turn to alternative resources. Unfortunately, often these alternative resources are forms of academic dishonesty, such as cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, and facilitation. Universities are struggling to find effective methods of prevention for academic dishonesty. Two techniques widely practiced are strict consequences and the use of honor codes. These preventative measures are not having the impact that universities hoped they would. The number of students who participate in academic dishonesty is continuing to increase each year.

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